1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

CHAPTER ONE

THE LEPCHAS AND SIKKIM

i

THE Lepchas[1] are a Mongoloid people living in the Himalayas on the southern and eastern slopes of Mount Kinchenjunga. It seems certain that they were originally the only inhabitants of this large tract of mountainous land, but during the last three centuries, or possibly longer, their land has been taken from them by conquering invaders, the Tibetans, the Nepali, and finally the English. At the time of the 1931 census the 25,780 registered Lepchas were almost evenly divided between the Native State of Sikkim and the Darjeeling district of British India, 13,000 being in Sikkim and the rest in Darjeeling, with the exception of 66 who were employed, chiefly as gardeners, in Calcutta.

There is no generally accepted theory among those anthropologists who believe that every tribe originally came from somewhere else as to the place of origin of the Lepchas. Various parts of Tibet and Mongolia have been suggested and a certain similarity has apparently been found between the Lepcha language and some dialect spoken in Indo-China. The Lepchas themselves have no tradition of migration and place the home of their ancestors—the people of Mayel—in one of the inaccessible valleys of Kinchenjunga.

The Lepchas do not appear ever to have resisted invasion of their own accord. Sikkim was apparently colonised by the Tibetans at some date prior to the beginning of the seventeenth century,[2]

[1] The Lepchas do not call themselves Lepchas; they call themselves *Rong*. 'Lepcha' is said to be a derogatory Nepali term—*lap-che*—meaning, though the philology is doubtful, 'nonsense talkers.' A parallel could be found in the Russian name for Germans—*nemetski*, which means 'the dumb ones.' Since all books dealing with the people and district refer to the Lepchas as Lepchas, it would seem merely pedantic and confusing to use the term *Rong*. The word would appear to have no other significance in Lepcha.

[2] I take the suggestion that Sikkim (which at that date included the present Darjeeling district) was colonised or at least dominated by the Tibetans before the beginning of the seventeenth century from *An Account of Tibet* by the

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

175 but it would seem as though this original colonisation was little more than a feudal overlordship imposed by a small minority on the Lepcha population. After the internal revolution and Chinese wars in Tibet in the early seventeenth century three 'Red Hat' lamas fled to Sikkim, speedily converted the Lepchas and what other inhabitants there were, and created a Sikkimese Tibetan king; from this king the present Maharajah of Sikkim is indirectly descended. A subsequent legend puts back the conversion of Sikkim to lamaism some centuries earlier; it is said that one of the lamaist saints lived in the country and deposited sacred writings in various caves, where they were subsequently discovered.

From the time of the establishment of a Sikkimese kingdom the Lepchas became an 'inferior' subject race, under the domination of the Sikkimese Tibetans or Bhotias, to which race the Maharajah and the big landowners belonged. For a considerable period the Lepchas were debarred on account of their race from entering the lamaist monasteries, and, though this rule is now relaxed, it is questionable whether a Lepcha could today obtain an important position in the big monasteries outside the Lepcha reserve. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Lepchas fought with the Sikkimese against the continued invasions of the Nepali and Bhutanese; the country was then in a very uncertain state, and there was continuous slave-raiding; the memory of this is still kept lively by the threat which older people will make to a crying child that 'If you don't keep quiet a Tibetan (or Bhutanese) will come along with a big bag and take you away.' During the early nineteenth century a number of treaties were made between Sikkim and British India, broken, and re-made; finally in 1835 the Darjeeling district, naturally together with its inhabitants, was ceded by the Maharajah to the British in exchange for an annuity.

648 It can be seen that the Lepchas have been for a considerable period a subject race, under the domination of the Bhotias and English. They are agriculturists and hunters, but in Sikkim the best land has been taken by the Bhotias, and later by the Nepali who have immigrated into the country in great numbers; in Darjeeling much of the jungle and agricultural land has been turned into tea-estates, and the Lepchas have become workers on the

Jesuit Ippolito Desideri (edited by Filippo de Filippi. London. George Routledge. 1932). Writing in the early eighteenth century Desideri speaks of Sikkim (p. 118 and *passim*) as a province of Tibet, which had to pay tribute to Lhassa, and he makes no mention of its relatively recent conquest. He calls the province Brèe-mè-jong, which means, 'the nice country.'

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

ceremonies may last anything from six hours to as many days—is thirsty work; and in the latter half of the services the officiants are seldom quite sober. These charges are never made openly or by one priest to another; in public they are quite amicable, though they usually affect to ignore the other's presence and performance.

The mythological justification for this amity between the two religions is that the patron spirits are husband and wife: the lamaist Tashey-*thing* is the husband, and the Mun (always a female spirit) the wife. For this reason, it is said, the lamas are stronger, and especially have more influence with the gods; the Mun on the other hand are perhaps more competent to deal with devils.

This attitude towards husband and wife, in which the husband is considered automatically the more powerful, is in itself probably a Tibetan import. For the Mun spirit has also another husband in the Padem (or Bum-*thing*); this latter resembles the Mun save that only men are possessed by it; a Padem is far less powerful than a Mun, and for many men this possession is the first step towards becoming a Mun. In the case of this supernatural husband and wife it is explained that the Mun is the more powerful because she is the wife; and this is far more congruent with the specific Mun mythology in which the female supernaturals are almost always the most important.

It would require far more knowledge than is at present available to be able to state definitely of the Lepcha folk-lore what elements are indigenous, what borrowed from Tibet, and what from other neighbouring tribes. My impression is that by far the greater number of stories told in Zongu, though many have foreign accretions, are of domestic origin. I only heard specifically Tibetan-lamaist stories from pious lamas, and by no means always from them.

ii

It is said that lamaism was introduced into Sikkim in or near 1641, the date of accession of the first lamaist king Penchoo Namgyé. He is said to have been made king by three lamas of the Nyingma-pa or 'Red Hat' sect, the unreformed branch of lamaism; these three lamas were fugitives from Tibet, following the violent struggles between the Yellow Hats and Red Hats and possibly Chinese or Mongolian intervention.

I have not been able to find any conclusive evidence as to the date of the conversion of the Lepchas to lamaism, or of their admission

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

into the lamaseries. The fact that in the beginning of the eighteenth century King Chador invented an alphabet for them so that they could read the scriptures suggests that by that date the majority were already converted; but for a long time—and even today in some of the monasteries of Sikkim—Lepchas and other foreigners are not accepted for training as lamas, this privilege being exclusive to pure-born and healthy Tibetans and Sikkimese (Bhotiyas). But in lamaism the layman has practically no rôle at all; he cannot pray to, address or influence the supernaturals save through the intermediary of a lama; and therefore conversion to lamaism without admission to instruction could mean little more than a sort of voluntary tax. The first monastery in Sikkim, that of Sanga Chelling, was founded in 1697, the Talung monastery in 1789, Lingthem monastery in 1855, and Gyatong in 1860.[4] The Lepcha monasteries are said to be under the jurisdiction of Pemiongchi monastery—the largest in Sikkim—which belongs to the Lhatsun-pa sub-sect of the Nyingma-pa.

Like all other religions lamaism is a compound of a number of heterogeneous elements. The chief component is Mahayana Buddhism, or 'the greater vehicle' (itself an elaboration of Hinayana or primitive Buddhism—'the lesser vehicle'), to which has accreted a good deal of tantric Hinduism, some Chinese and Mongolian elements, and possibly the original Tibetan Bön-po religion.[5] Like other religions too, lamaism presents three aspects: a justifying mythology and scriptures, an ethic, and a social organisation.

The foundation and justification of lamaism is contained in the scriptures, above all in the two enormous collections of holy writings, the Kangyour or commandments (the Bible) and the Tangyour or commentaries (the Talmud). In these, together with other minor works, are to be found all knowledge and all necessary instruction for the conduct of life. The books have by themselves a talismanic virtue, and the reading of them is the essential preliminary to acquiring merit. These books apparently contain a

[4] I have taken these dates, and one or two other general statements from *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*, vol. I (Calcutta 1894), particularly from the section *Lamaism in Sikkim* (pp. 241–391) by L. A. Waddell. Here, as in his book *The Buddhism of Tibet* (2nd. edition Heffer's, 1934), Dr. Waddell is exclusively concerned with the Tibetans and Sikkimese, and only mentions the Lepchas incidentally.

[5] Some modern critics suggest that this Bön-po religion may be the remnants of an historically earlier and unrecorded conversion of Tibet to Buddhism.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

introduced into the country about the middle of the seventeenth century by Lha-Tsun Ch'em-Bo, the patron saint of Sikkim. 173 797

Lha-Tsun is so intimately connected with the local form of Lamaism, figures so frequently in the strange hotch-potch of fact and fiction that passes for history, that it is essential to give some details of his life, so far as they are known. 175

Lha-Tsun Ch'em-Bo is a Tibetan title meaning "The great reverend god." His ordinary religious name is Kun-zan num-gye, or "The entirely victorious essence of goodness"; but he is also known by the title of Lha-tsun num kha Jig-may, or "the reverend god who fears not the sky." This is with reference to his alleged power of flying. He has yet another name, being sometimes referred to as Kusho Dsog-ch'en Ch'em-bo, or "The great and honourable Dsog-ch'en," the latter part of which name means literally "The great end," this being the technical name for the particular system of mysticism practised by the Nin-ma-pa sect, of which he was a member. Kusho means merely "the honourable," and is the title by which all persons of position are addressed in Tibet.

He was born in the fire-bird year of the tenth of the sixty-year cycles, corresponding to A.D. 1595, in the district of Kongbu, in south-eastern Tibet. Having spent many years in various monasteries and in travelling through Tibet and Sikkim, he eventually arrived in Lhasa in 1648, where he obtained such repute by his learning that he attracted the favourable notice of one Nag-wan, the greatest of the Grand Lamas, who shortly afterwards became the first of the so-called Dalai Lamas. Indeed, it is said that it was mainly through the special instructions given by Lha-tsun to the Grand Lama that the latter was so favourably treated by the Emperor of China and confirmed in the temporal rule of Tibet.

The detailed account of the saint's meeting with Nag-wan is worth citing as an example of the curious blend of the crude and the marvellous, of which most of these indigenous narratives are composed.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

175 In the year previous to that in which the fifth Grand Lama went to China, probably about A.D. 1649, the Grand Lama told his attendants that he had dreamt a sage would visit him that day. Should he do so he was at once to be admitted to the presence. Lha-tsun, arriving at the site now named Pargo-K'alin, immediately below the Potala, the Dalai Lama's palace, blew loudly a *kalin*, or trumpet made from a human thigh-bone; but the castle guard, in ignorance of Lha-tsun's identity, seized him and tied him to the Do-ring monolith as a punishment for daring to trumpet so close to the palace. The saint, however, soon caused the whole hill of Potala to shake, and by this means his arrival was brought to the notice of the Grand Lama, who ordered his instant release and admission.

On coming into the presence of the Grand Lama he walked boldly up and struck the latter with his fist and then vomited before him, much to the astonishment and disgust of the attendant courtiers. The saint then explained his action: "You are shortly going to China," he said; "and on the way a great danger awaits you, but my striking you has rid you of that danger. In China you will find yourself in great peril some day. When that happens consult this paper which I now give you, and you will be relieved. My vomiting in your presence means that you will ultimately be invested with great power and riches through my good offices."

The dilemma prophesied at this time turned out to be a query posed by the Emperor of China regarding the "essence of the rainbow colour," which quite confounded the Grand Lama. But he suddenly remembered the episode with the saint, consulted the paper, and found that it contained the required information. He so astonished the Emperor by the sagacity of his reply that he loaded him with honours and riches. The Grand Lama, on his return from China, offered Lha-tsun much treasure as a reward for the services he had rendered: this, however, the saint refused.

Previous to his visit to Lhasa it is said that the saint,

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

ccompanied by a few disciples, journeyed to the south-west 175
f Tibet, saying: "According to the prophecy of Guru
Rimpoche I must go and open the northern gate of the
hidden country of the rice-valleys,' De-mo-jong, meaning
Sikkim; and I must develop that country religiously." He
hen proceeded by way of Shigatse and Sakya to Zar, a
hort distance to the north of Tashi-rab-ka near the Nepal
rontier, where he founded a monastery.

He next attempted to enter Sikkim by way of Jongri, but
could find no path, and remained for many days in a cave,
he name of which means "the very pleasant grove," near
Kan-la nan-ma. There "the everlasting summit of the five
epositories of snow," the mountain god Konchen, trans-
ormed himself into a wild goose and conversed with the
age; and here, according to the prophecy of Guru Rimpoche,
e composed the book named "The Complete Book of
Worship and Offerings for Kinchinjunga."

At this time another Lama, of the Kar-tok-pa sub-sect,
ame searching for a path into Sikkim. He tried, without
uccess, the so-called "Monkey-back rock" (with reference
o its semblance to a monkey sitting with its hands behind
ts back), and then the road from Jongri; but having reached
he cave of "the very pleasant grove" he fell in with the
aint, who told him that since he was not destined to open
'the northern gate" he should go round and try the western
ntrance.

Lha-tsun then flew miraculously to the upper part of
Mount Kabru, where once again he blew his *kalin:* and after
n interval of two weeks he flew down to where his servants
were collected and guided them to Norbu-gang in Sikkim.

Soon after this there arrived two other *Nin-ma* Lamas.
By way of "the western gate" of Singalila came the Kar-
ok-pa Lama already mentioned, whose name was "The
Great Soul," and a Lama of the Na-dak-pa sect named
"The Great Sage," who had opened "the southern gate" by
way of Darjeeling and Namchi. The place where these three
Lamas met was afterwards called by the Lepchas Yok-sam,

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

175 which means "(the place of) the three superior ones."

The three Lamas now held council together, at which Lha-tsun said: "We three Lamas have reached a new and irreligious country. We must have a 'dispenser of gifts,' a king, to rule the country on our behalf." To this the Na-dak-pa Lama replied: "I am descended from the celebrated Terton Na-dak Nan-rel, who was himself a king; I should therefore be the king here." But the Kar-tok-pa Lama would have none of this. "Since I too am of royal lineage I have the right to rule," he said. But to this Lha-tsun now replied: "I should tell you that according to the prophecy of the Guru Rimpoche it is written that four noble brothers shall meet in Sikkim and there arrange for its government. We are three of these, having come respectively from the north, west, and south. Towards the east, so it is written, there is at this time a man named Pun-tsok, a descendant of the brave people of Kham, a province of Eastern Tibet; and according to the prophecy of the Master we should invite him to join us."

Two messengers were then dispatched to search for this Pun-tsok. Going towards the east of Sikkim they arrived at Gangtok, where they saw a man churning milk and asked him his name. He did not reply, but invited them to sit down, after which he gave them milk to drink. After they were somewhat refreshed the man said that his name was Pun-tsok. He was then conducted to the Lamas, who crowned him by placing the holy water-vase upon his head and anointed him with the water. They exhorted him to rule the country religiously and gave him Lha-tsun's own surname of Num-gye, with the additional title of "The great religious king."

Pun-tsok was at this time aged thirty-eight and he became a Lama in the same year. This was about A.D. 1641.

Lha-tsun spent the greater part of the rest of his life in Sikkim, exploring its caves and mountain recesses, composing its Lamaist legends, and fixing sites for temples and monastories. He first built a hut at Dub-de, which afterwards

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

became the monastery of that name. He is also believed to have founded shrines at Tashiding, Pemiongchi, and Sang-na-ch'o-ling; but others assert that Tashiding was first occupied by the Na-dak-pa Lama.

Lha-tsun is usually represented as seated on a leopard-skin mat with the right leg hanging down and his body almost bare, one of his titles being He-ru-ka-pa, which means unclad. His complexion is of a dark blue hue; but he is otherwise somewhat like his prototype, the Guru Rimpoche. A chaplet of skulls encircles his brow; and in his left hand is a skull-cup filled with blood, and a trident topped with human heads rests in front of the left shoulder. The right hand is in the traditional teaching attitude.

He is believed to be the incarnation of the great Indian teacher Bhima Mitra: and he himself is held to have been subsequently incarnated twice as a Sikkim Lama, the last reincarnation being Jigmi Pa-wo, who was born at Ok-ja-ling, near Sakya, who built the present monastery at Pemiongchi.

The place and manner of his death are apparently unknown; but he is currently reported to have died in Sikkim of fever contracted while on a visit to India. The dark livid hue of his skin is said to be due to his death from a malignant fever. His chief object in visiting India was, according to a popular saying, to obtain a rare variety of ruddy leopard-skin, such as is highly prized by Hindu ascetics as a mat.

All his clothing and personal effects are carefully treasured in Sikkim and worshipped as most sacred relics. They were stored at Pemiongchi monastery until the time of the Gurkha invasion in the last century, when, for greater safety, most of them were taken to the remote Talung monastery.

At Pemiongchi one complete set of his full-dress robes is kept, including hat and boots, hand-drum, bell, *dorje*, and a miraculous *purbu*, or dagger for stabbing the demons. These objects are only shown on special occasions to wealthy worshippers, and they are highly celebrated as a certain cure for barrenness. Couples thus afflicted, and who can afford

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

778 the necessary expense, have a preliminary service carried
842 out in the chapel, lasting for one or two days, after which the box containing the holy relics is brought forth and ceremoniously opened. Each article is placed on the heads of the suppliants, the officiating Lama meanwhile repeating various charms and spells. Of the marvellous efficacy of this procedure many stories are told: and should two sons result, one of them is invariably dedicated to the Church.

175 Subsequent to Lha-tsun's death in the latter end of the
794 seventeenth century, Lamaism has steadily progressed in Sikkim till latterly monks and monasteries filled the country.
[212] What civilisation and literature the Sikkimese now possess they owe entirely to Lamaism, and the Lepcha alphabet too was derived from the Tibetan.

175 The official version of the story, as given in the *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, is somewhat different, and brings the history up to date. It runs as follows:

"Local tradition asserts that the ancestors of the Rajas of Sikkim originally came from the neighbourhood of Lhasa in Tibet. About the middle of the seventeenth century, the head of the family was named Puntsok Numgye; and to him repaired three Tibetan monks, professors of Nyingmapa (or 'red-cap' sect of Buddhism), who were disgusted at the predominance of the Gelukpa sect in Tibet. These Lamas succeeded in converting the Lepchas of Sikkim to their own faith, and in making Pun-tsok Raja of the country. The *avatars* of two of these Lamas are now the heads, respectively, of the great monasteries of Pemiongchi and Tashiding. In 1788 the Gurkhas invaded Sikkim in the governorship of the Morang or *tarai*, and only retired in 1789 on the Tibetan government ceding to them a piece of territory at the head of the Koti Pass. But in 1792, on a second invasion of Tibetan territory by the Gurkhas, an immense Chinese army advanced to the support of the Tibetans, defeated the Gurkhas, and dictated terms to them almost at the gates of Kathmandu."

It may be noted in passing that this account was probably

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

compiled from Tibetan and Chinese sources, the only ones available at the time it was written; and for this reason it places the Gurkhas in a somewhat unfavourable light. There is no doubt, however, that the Gurkhas were in the wrong: they had overrun Sikkim and even looted Shigatse, which, by reason of its being the home of the Tashi Lama, is one of the most venerated places in all Tibet. There is little doubt that the Chinese army actually entered Nepalese territory; but that they dictated terms within sight of the capital is not so sure. According to the Nepalese version of the story the Chinese were greatly impressed with the valour of the Gurkhas, and their General retired amicably after arranging for the despatch of a quinquennial trade mission to Pekin. The arrangement was faithfully kept and a mission went from Nepal to China once every five years. With the fall of the central government, however, the arrangement lapsed and has since been discontinued; but the relations between the two countries have remained friendly.

"On the breaking out of the Nepal War in 1814, Major Latter at the head of a British force occupied the Morang, and formed an alliance with the Raja of Sikkim, who gladly seized the opportunity of revenging himself on the Gurkhas. At the close of the war in 1816, the Raja was rewarded by a considerable accession of territory, which has been ceded to the British by Nepal. In February, 1835, the Raja granted the site of Darjeeling to the British, and received a pension of Rs. 3,000 per annum in lieu of it."

This last seems to have been an astute piece of business on somebody's part; a pension of little more than two hundred pounds a year in return for a grant of land which is now the richest tea-producing area in the whole of India.

"There was, however, a standing cause of quarrel between the Raja and the paramount power, due to the prevalence of slavery in Sikkim; the Raja's subjects were inveterate kidnappers, and the Raja himself was most anxious to obtain from the British authorities the restoration of runaway slaves. With some notion of enforcing the latter demand,

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

175 Dr. Campbell, the Superintendent of Darjeeling, and Dr. Hooker, the famous naturalist, were seized in 1849 whilst travelling in Sikkim, and detained for six weeks. As a punishment for this outrage the Raja's pension was stopped, and a piece of territory, including the lower course of the Tista and the Sikkim tarai, was annexed. The practice of kidnapping Bengali subjects of the British Crown was, however, not discontinued; and two especially gross cases in 1860 led to an order that the Sikkim territory, north of the Ramman river and west of the Rangit, should be occupied until restitution was made. Colonel Gawler, at the head of a British force, with the Hon. Ashley Eden as envoy, advanced into Sikkim and proceeded to Tumlong, when the Raja was forced to make full restitution, and to sign a treaty (in March, 1861) which secured the rights of free trade, of protection for travellers, and of road-making. For many years the State was left to manage its own affairs; but for some time prior to 1888 the Tibetans were found to be intriguing with the Maharaja, who became more and more unfriendly. Affairs reached a climax in 1888, when war broke out with the Tibetans, who took up a position eleven miles within Sikkim territory. British troops were sent against them, and they were driven off with ease. In 1889 a political officer subordinate to the Commissioner of the Rajshai Division was stationed at Gangtok (now the capital of Sikkim) to advise and assist the Maharaja and his council; and this was followed in 1890 by the execution of a convention with the Chinese, by which the British protectorate over Sikkim and its exclusive control over the internal administration and foreign relations of the State were recognised. Since the Tibetan expedition (the so-called Younghusband 'Mission') of 1904, the Political officer has been directly responsible to the Government of India.

"After the appointment of the Political officer in 1889 communications were greatly improved by the construction of roads and bridges, and the settlement of Nepalese was permitted in certain parts of the State. These measures were

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

followed by the rapid development of the country. Settlers from Nepal flocked in, and the population, which in 1891 was returned at 30,458, had grown to 59,014 ten years later; an increase of 93.7 per cent." 175

The story of the Nepalese invasion is still known by most of the older people. This is the version told me by the Mandal of Lingtem, who was given it by his father: 173

In olden days the Maharaja of Sikkim lived in Fyung Di. One day his chief minister, who was also a famous Lama, said to him: "Your Highness; war is undoubtedly coming before long, so let us get away with our possessions while there is still time." To this, however, the King replied: "What do you, a mere Tibetan, know of war or other affairs of state? Even if war does come, cannot I and my seven sons defeat with ease any paltry Gurkha army that may come to attack us?" But the minister, whose name was Lha-Tsun Ch'em-Bo,* was not convinced, and taking leave of the King he gathered together his considerable possessions and set off towards the Chumbi Valley. Shortly after his departure news arrived that the Gurkha army was approaching the capital; and even before it reached Fyung Di it had already inflicted several defeats on the peace-loving Lepchas. The Queen and her sons implored the King to flee; but he was adamant and remained alone on guard. He stood with his shield in one hand and a drawn sword in the other, and threatened to cut down anyone who dared to approach him. But his six grown-up sons were more prudent, and decided to set off on their own. The Queen remained behind with her husband, and it was only when the invading army had already reached the outskirts of the town that the King at last acceded to his wife's entreaties. They hurried off just as they were; the palace was left open and nothing was even

* Lha-Tsun Ch'em-Bo must have been dead for nearly two hundred years when the Nepal war took place; but, as I have already noted, Sikkim history is a mixture of fact and fiction, and the Lepcha likes to associate the patron saint of his country with every important happening. He will be found to figure in nearly every story of this sort; if not in person, then in a reincarnated form.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

173 bows. The Gurkhas were by now thoroughly terrified and their remnants retired in disorder. The Maharaja was thereupon summoned from Tibet and as soon as he arrived the country was finally cleared of the marauding Gurkhas, and the boundary fixed. It ran along the line Niu-oong-Munshi-oong-Du-Du Kosi (presumably the Dudh Kosi) and Tambar Kosi. For a long time the Maharaja used to collect taxes in this area, but no longer does so, as it is now part of Nepal. After settling the boundary, the Maharaja returned to Fyung Di, but he found only the walls of his place still standing. He summoned many Lamas and asked them to call the Lord Konchen, to whom a bullock was first sacrificed. At the same time all the other gods were also summoned. Konchen was told that since his was the greatest influence in Sikkim he must help in getting revenge upon the Gurkhas, who had wrought such terrible destruction all over the country. He agreed to help and said he would send devils to destroy Nepal. One year later the Mikrum Di, in which all the stolen treasure was stored, was engulfed in a rising lake. All the occupants of the palace, including the then King of Nepal, were drowned, but it is said that the palace is still visible beneath the water. Ever since that day half the wealth of Sikkim has remained buried in the lake and the other half is stored in Tulung Monastery, where it was put by Lha-Tsun-Ch'em-Bo. It cannot be touched because Lha-Tsun left it in the charge of certain devils who would immediately take their revenge if anyone tried to touch it. It is for this reason that the Maharaja can make no use of it. No one has ever seen the treasure, but the boxes in which it is stored are still visible in Talung. It is said that the people of Nepal are still very afraid of the Lepchas, but actually, so said the Mandal: "the only thing Lepchas are any good at nowadays is carrying other people's loads!"

175 The settlement of Gurkhas in Sikkim is no new thing, and I imagine there must have been a number already there even before the war with Nepal. Their coming has not been altogether a bad thing, for neither the Lepcha, still less the

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

Tibetan, is at heart an agriculturist. Left to himself the Lepcha is but a poor cultivator, and he had need of the Gurkhas to show him how to make the best use of his land. The Gurkha needed land, the Lepcha instruction; but probably no one realised how this give and take would end. However it was, a line has now been fixed beyond which Gurkhas may not acquire land; and none but Lepchas may settle in Jongu. But to continue the Mandal's story:

Many, many years ago, in the time of Raja Pun-tsok, there was a man named Laso Kaji, who thought he would like to possess the district of Jongu, which is one of the most fertile parts of Sikkim. He went to the Raja and told him of his desire, saying that the land he wanted was only a tiny piece, stony and unfertile. Since the Raja had not himself travelled, and indeed did not even know the names of his villages, he readily consented, at which Laso departed happy. Now the Raja had a favourite minister whose name was Yuk Ting Takshay, and this man he trusted greatly. He badly wanted some special poison plants, called *Sumdo* and *Vim-pot*, which were to be found only high up in the mountains, and which had the peculiar quality at night of shining like bright flames. They were extremely rare, and their possession brought with it the acquisition of every kind of riches. Yuk Ting Takshay set off on his quest, taking with him vast quantities of gold and silver, many copper vessels, a huge leaden mill, ivory, and a large assortment of such musical instruments as are used in monasteries. There was also much rich clothing, of the sort worn only by rajas and other great men. All these things he brought from Fyung Di, where the capital was in those days.

In the course of his travels Yuk Ting Takshay came to a place called Navar Hlo, which he reached just as night was falling. This place was the home of many devils, who refused to let him continue. But when they saw all the beautiful treasure he had brought they agreed to let him pass provided he left it behind. This he did; and in return the devils turned night into day, so that the minister need not

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

they were, and they told him they had been sent by Laso 173
Kaji with orders to kill both him and his men. Yuk Ting Takshay was very angry, and single-handed though he was, he managed to disarm all of Laso's men. Later on, when the row had somewhat subsided, Yuk Ting Takshay's followers returned, and the next morning he sent them across the river to find out what Laso Kaji meant. Laso was somewhat perplexed, as he had no idea of whom he had attacked. He decided to slaughter a bullock and sent it across as something in the nature of a peace offering. At the same time he sent word apologising for what he had done, and particularly asked Yuk Ting Takshay not to let the Raja know what had happened, for he feared for his life. Yuk Ting Takshay accepted the carcass and agreed to do what was asked of him, but at the same time he ordered Laso Kaji to leave the district, which he did. He went off no one knows where, but his descendants are now living in Namchi. From that day Jongu was taken over by the Raja and has formed part of the private estate ever since.

Laso Kaji's descendants seem to have kept up the family 175 ●
tradition of lawlessness, for in 1861 we find the then holder of the title opposing a British force.

Writing on the 20th February from Rungpodon, on the banks of the Teesta, Colonel Gawler describes his meeting with him:

"I considered it expedient that our point for crossing the Teesta should be within, at most, three days' march of Tumloong (to obviate our being obliged to form any large depots on the other side of the river); but, as this would necessitate a march for some distance up the right bank from Temi, I determined on cutting all bridges below the point I might select, so that neither my force nor convoys might be liable to annoyance during what would be a flank march.

"I therefore started the next morning, an hour before daylight, to search for bridges, and about nine o'clock found a large one at the Linsing Ghat, a few miles above the Took Ghat. On approaching it I was met by three natives bearing

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

175a flag of truce and two letters, which were immediately forwarded to Mr. Eden, the Special Commissioner.

"The natives informed me that Lassoo Kajee was on the other side (of the Teesta) and wished to come across.

"As I knew that Mr. Eden wished every facility to be afforded to natives to come in and return to their villages, and had heard Lassoo Kajee's name mentioned particularly, I said that he might come, and concealed my men in the jungles along the bank, near the bridge. There were several hours' delay while he was getting (as they informed us) his baggage ready, and during this time we observed that the stockades opposite were full of men, armed with matchlocks and rifles: I also observed one or two jingalls.[1] Across the river was about a stone's throw, and the opposite jungle was thick with faces peeping at us. There was a strongly marked difference between these curious ones and those who manned the stockades. The tall figures, features, attitudes, and demeanours of the latter were totally unlike the effeminate Lepcha, or even the Bhooteas whom I had hitherto seen. I was informed that they were Tibetans, the guard of the Sikkim Raja, who had sent a detachment of them to every bridge.

"As Mr. Eden had told me that he did not wish me to stop operations for anything, I informed Lassoo Kajee when he arrived that I had come to cut the bridge. He replied that he had given orders that no one should cross while he was negotiating, but I told him that I could not spare a picket to see that his orders were not disobeyed, nor did I want to have to make a second trip, and that if he wished to recross at the point he could do so on a raft. (Rafts do not take long in making, but require five men, at least, on each side, to work them, and will only take from fifteen to twenty men at a time. A party crossing to annoy us would not be satisfied with a raft as a means of retreat. By a hot pursuit they might all be caught, for the men would not stop to work the raft.)

"Lassoo Kajee at length said that his own men should destroy the stockades and the bridge, and after some more time spent in parleying, and the guards removing

[1] [A large musket or crude cannon, fired from a swivel.--Analyst]

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

their baggage and marching out, this was effected.* 175

"We then left, and Lassoo Kajee accompanied us and asked us to send an escort with him to Mr. Eden at Temi, for he was on his way there on the previous evening, and hearing firing ran down again, and falling on the rocks hurt his leg severely. Ascending the ridge towards our camp we saw Mr. Eden and Cheboo Lama coming down the ridge behind us from Temi, he having understood that I was encamped on the river bank. I returned to him with Lassoo Kajee, and we then went to the river bank and talked with some of the people on the opposite side, and it was arranged that those who wished might cross on rafts. Mr. Eden then returned to Temi and I to my camp."

To the above account it is only necessary to add that 648 friendly relations have continued with Sikkim ever since, and that the country, although completely independent, is now the chief refuge of tired Calcutta residents in search of health. Mountaineers, mostly from Europe, are also visiting the country in ever-increasing numbers; and hardly a year now passes without some hitherto virgin peak being climbed. Kinchinjunga, however, has so far resisted every assault, and it seems likely that many years will pass before man is able to overcome its most formidable defences.

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* "On leaving Namchi, the force was divided into three parties, the main column, under Captain Impey, proceeding direct towards the Teesta, and two parties, under Colonel Gawler and Captain Urwin respectively, making long detours to the left and right, with the view of all reuniting again at the Teesta. Captain Impey's column surprised the Sikkimese camp at Temi; they fled, leaving their clothes and weapons, and were pursued down within a few miles of the Teesta. From that time no further attempt at opposition was made; the people were perfectly paralysed at the rapid movements of the troops, whom they perceived to be advancing in several directions at once, by forced marches, through dense forests, and over pathless mountains, traversing in one day distances which even the natives of these hills considered to be three fair marches."—*Extract from Mr. Eden's final report, No. 40, April 8th, 1861.*